Appendix B.8 – AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP in Times of Disaster

Overview

Disaster Services is one of the key focus areas of AmeriCorps Seniors. With its expansive network of volunteers across the country, AmeriCorps Seniors is committed to working within the communities it serves to respond to and recover from disasters when they strike. Each of the three AmeriCorps Seniors programs can provide disaster services to their communities in times of need. However, AmeriCorps Seniors grantee operations and volunteers are themselves sometimes impacted and unable to function as normal. This document is intended to provide a framework to guide grantees who either wish to assist with response and recovery operations or who have been affected by a disaster.

What to Do When Disaster Strikes

The primary concern of AmeriCorps Seniors during a disaster is the immediate safety and security of its grantees and volunteers. It is important for grantee staff and volunteers to follow all community, office, or building disaster preparedness plans for your location. Monitor your local news sources for the most up to date information and follow local or state emergency services guidance.

In order to ensure that all volunteers are accounted for before or after a disaster, AmeriCorps Seniors suggests that its grantees establish a phone tree as part of any disaster preparedness planning. Program Directors or the assigned disaster preparedness staff member will contact grantee staff members, who should each be assigned an equal number of volunteers in advance to contact before a known potential disaster—such as a hurricane—and/or after the immediate danger of a disaster has passed. Grantee staff will then report back to the relevant phone tree coordinator. AmeriCorps Seniors program directors should expect to be contacted by the Portfolio Manager who will be gathering information and updates on affected programs.

Responding to and Recovering from Disasters

Once AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers and grantee staff are accounted for, grantees should assess whether or to what degree operations are impacted. AmeriCorps Seniors provides flexibility to grantees to revise work plans and performance measures in the aftermath of disasters in cases when original plans are no longer feasible and/or AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers can respond to emerging community needs in disaster response and long term recovery. A set of FAQs has been provided as an appendix to this document outlining some of the ways that disaster affected programs may wish to adjust their work, as well as details on allowance and reassignment of volunteers.

For AmeriCorps Seniors programs with the desire or capacity to assist in disaster response and recovery efforts in their communities are strongly encouraged to consult with their Portfolio Manager and the CNCS Disaster Services Unit (DSU). Coordination with these key AmeriCorps helps coordinate, track, and promote the full national service response and ensure that AmeriCorps Seniors activity is highlighted. Furthermore, these offices have experience, training, and access to resources to support AmeriCorps Seniors

projects in effective service delivery. The response to a disaster will vary depending on AmeriCorps Seniors program and the local project design, but we know that national service is a powerful tool for helping to meet the needs of communities when disaster strikes.

AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP
In consultation with the AmeriCorps Portfolio Manager, AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in RSVP service activities and work plans may be modified to add additional work plans to meet the new community needs resulting from a disaster. AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP projects that already have service activities and work plans in the disaster services focus area may consider expanding these service activities to meet the increased needs resulting from a disaster in their geographic service area.

AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program
AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in FGP who are unable to continue to serve their previously assigned children may be assigned temporarily to other children in shelters or other settings and may serve groups of children, while seeking to provide one-on-one assistance wherever possible.

AmeriCorps Seniors Senior Companion Program
AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in SCP who are unable to continue to serve their previously assigned clients may be assigned temporarily to assist other adults with special needs. Assignment plans in such cases may be written generically in recognition of the temporary nature of the assignments.

Additional Questions and Answers for AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP
Project Operations in the Affected Area

1) **We have lost all or a great many of our project files and other records as a result of the disaster. What should we do?**

   Please contact your Portfolio Manager and advise them of the extent of the damage. It is important to document for your records when the damage occurred, how it occurred, the extent of the damage, and what types of files were lost. Where possible, include photographs.

2) **We will be unable to achieve one of more of our performance measures because the disaster has interrupted or changed our project operations. What should we do?**

   Please contact your Portfolio Manager and discuss the revisions of your performance measures and negotiate revised or new performance measures. After agreement is reached, amend your eGrants application.

3) **As a result of the redirection of volunteer effort to support emergency disaster response activities, one or more of our project work plans will no**

longer be valid. What should we do?

Please contact your Portfolio Manager and discuss how your redirected activities will result in new work plans. Changes in programmatic activities must be reflected in your grant via an amendment in eGrants. If a work plan is no longer valid, please indicate in the community needs section. If a new work plan is needed, it would be added in eGrants as an amendment. If the work plans to be modified include performance measures, discuss the revisions of your performance measures and negotiate revised or new performance measures. After agreement is reached, amend your eGrants application.

4) **If a project in our state is unable to access eGrants, how should we process the required amendments?**

Contact your Portfolio Manager to troubleshoot the issue.

Projects in Non-Affected Areas
1) **Evacuees from a disaster area are in my community living in temporary housing. Our project would like to shift some of our volunteers to support the evacuees. Can we do so?**

Yes. Please contact your Portfolio Manager to discuss how your redirected activities will result in changes in your work plans. Changes in programmatic activities must be reflected in your grant via an amendment in eGrants. If a work plan is no longer valid, please indicate in the community needs section. If a new work plan is needed, it would be added in eGrants as an amendment. If the work plans to be modified include performance measures, contact your Portfolio Manager and discuss the revisions of your performance measures and negotiate revised or new performance measures. After agreement is reached, amend your eGrants application.

2) **May our volunteers respond to needs outside the project's service area resulting from a disaster, either by transporting or accompanying evacuees from where they are currently housed to the project service area or by serving at a distant location?**

The service of AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers should focus on needs in their communities, including helping with the local response to the needs of evacuees.

- Grant funds should not be used to transport evacuees.
- Grant funds may be used to reimburse meals or transportation costs for a AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer who is requested by a disaster response organization to accompany a child or adult who is being relocated.
- Grantees are encouraged to check with their insurance carrier concerning any limitations on liability coverage.